

THE "SENATOR PAUL WELLSTONE  
MENTAL HEALTH EQUITABLE  
TREATMENT ACT OF 2003"

**HON. PATRICK J. KENNEDY**

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, February 27, 2003*

Mr. KENNEDY of Rhode Island. Mr. Speaker, despite the will of the American people, despite the will of bipartisan majorities in Congress, despite the insistence of the President of the United States and the maxims of decency, and fairness, a mental health parity bill has yet to be enacted.

That is why, today, with Senators DOMENICI and KENNEDY, and Congressman Jim RAMSTAD, I am again introducing the Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act of 2003. This bill has been named in honor of the late Senator Paul Wellstone who fought hard for the cause of equal opportunity for all Americans.

The Wellstone Parity Act is, at its core, a civil rights bill. It recognizes that the right to basic healthcare for millions of Americans continues to be violated due to lingering bigotry. It reflects the values on which this country was built, principles of inclusion and opportunity for all Americans.

This bill will help tens of millions of our fellow countrymen and women who suffer from mental illnesses gain needed access to treatment. Treatment, which they currently are denied and have been for quite some time. This bill is based on parity provisions in the Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP), which Members of Congress, other federal employees, and their families already have.

Specifically, it requires that group health plans, which choose to provide mental health benefits not impose any treatment limits or financial requirements for mental health care unless comparable treatment limits or financial requirements are imposed for physical health benefits.

With that said, there has, unfortunately, been a lot of misinformation circulated with regards to this bill. Therefore, it is important that I clarify what this bill does not do.

It does not require health plans to cover treatment of mental illnesses. It only applies if they choose to include mental health benefits.

It does not prevent group health plans from managing benefits as a means to contain costs, and to monitor and improve the quality of care. In fact, it specifically protects insurers' right to apply management techniques.

It does not mandate coverage of specific mental health services, nor does it allow endless "Woody Allen-like" psychoanalysis for every beneficiary. This bill unambiguously allows plans to make medical necessity determinations so that care can be provided judiciously.

It does not require parity between two or more employer-sponsored benefits plans. It only requires parity within each individual plan.

It does not require parity for out-of-network benefits, as long as in-network benefits are provided at parity and the plan provides reasonable access to in-network providers and facilities.

Opponents of this bill will say it is too expensive and drives up the cost of healthcare.

The data, however, show otherwise. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has projected that enactment of a parity bill of this kind would result in premium increases of only 0.9%. The collective experience of many states that have passed parity laws, as well as the FEHBP, closely mirrors the CBO projections.

In fact, the CBO estimate may be too high. The CBO projections did not take into account the billions of dollars of savings employers will gain with reduced absenteeism, fewer disability claims, and lower general health services associated with untreated mental illnesses.

The Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act of 2003 is not just an instrument to repeal the prohibition on Americans to gain access to affordable and needed mental health care; it is also a bill that addresses an ever-increasing public health crisis in our nation.

Mental illness is our nation's second leading cause of morbidity and mortality. In the United States, severe mental illnesses are more common than cancer, diabetes or heart disease; one in four Americans will suffer from a serious mental disorder in their lifetime; more than 51 million Americans suffer from a mental disorder in a year; 67% of elderly nursing home residents have a diagnosable mental illness; 67% of the population with AIDS will develop a neuropsychiatric disorder; more than ten million children suffer from a serious emotional disorder and more than 30,000 people commit suicide every year.

Each of these statistics has a human face associated with it. Anna Westin of Chaska, Minnesota suffered from a serious eating disorder that required inpatient hospitalization. When her insurance company told her hospital that her mental health benefits had been exhausted, she was prematurely discharged and sent home. One month later, after receiving this inadequate medical care, she committed suicide. Anna is just one of many Americans victimized by the cruelty of medical discrimination.

Discrimination is a discarded idea from the past. Yet, in certain sectors of our society it continues to thrive like a malignant cancer infecting and feeding off the soul of our nation. For the sake of our parents, our grandparents, our children, our neighbors, and ourselves, we must finally excise this cancer from our society.

In the 19th century, famed novelist and poet Victor Hugo wrote: "There's one thing stronger than all the armies of the world: And that is an idea whose time has come."

The time for mental health parity has arrived. I want to thank my colleagues for the strong bipartisan support this legislation has received, and I look forward to finally removing this dreadful stain of discrimination that defiles the spirit of America.

RECOGNITION OF MATTHEW  
ISADORE REYES

**HON. SAM GRAVES**

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, February 27, 2003*

Mr. GRAVES. Mr. Speaker, I proudly pause to recognize Matthew Isadore Reyes, a very

special young man who has exemplified the finest qualities of citizenship and leadership by taking an active part in the Boy Scouts of America, Troop 314, and in earning the most prestigious award of Eagle Scout.

Matthew has been very active with his troop, participating in summer camp at H. Roe Bartle Scout Reservation and earning the status of Brave in the tribe of Mic-O-Say. During the six years he has been involved in scouting, he has earned 38 merit badges and is Brotherhood Member of The Order of the Arrow. Matthew also has been honored for his numerous scouting achievements, earning the rank of Patrol Leader of the Panther Patrol and Runner at Camp Naish.

For his Eagle Scout project, Matthew built two cedar benches and planted a tree for the Rolling Hills Community Church. He was able to get all of the materials for his project donated.

Mr. Speaker, I proudly ask you to join me in commending Matthew Isadore Reyes for his accomplishments with the Boy Scouts of America and for his efforts put forth in achieving the highest distinction of Eagle Scout.

TRIBUTE TO IRVIN WHITTAKER

**HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON**

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, February 27, 2003*

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, in commemoration of Black History Month, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the many accomplishments of distinguished African-Americans in Mississippi's Second Congressional District.

Irvin Whittaker is a native of Carrollton County. Although many close to Mr. Whittaker felt that education should not be his primary focus, he had a strong desire to complete high school. With money that he saved from sharecropping, Mr. Whittaker moved to Jackson, Mississippi. It was here that he decided to enter Lanier High School. During High School, Mr. Whittaker became part of the active reserves and spent six months in the Army. In 1959, he re-entered high school at Marshall High School where he started to play basketball. While playing he was noticed by a coach and was offered a scholarship to Mississippi Industrial College.

Upon graduating, Mr. Whittaker's professional career in education began. In 1963, he was appointed as a teacher at Old Salem High School in Ashland, Mississippi. Mr. Whittaker was then appointed as principal of Marshall High School where he served until 1968. In 1968, Mr. Whittaker became assistant principal at Amanda Elzy High School. After serving for two years, Mr. Whittaker later became the principal. In 1983, he was asked by the Superintendent of Leflore County Schools to serve as Assistant Superintendent. In 1991, Mr. Whittaker was elected to the office of the County Superintendent, an office which he held until his retirement in 2000.